

MSDL Annual Meeting Minutes

May 7, 2022 @ 11:00 AM

Needham High School

The meeting was called to order at 11:03 AM by the president, Greg Cunningham

Board Members in attendance

Joyce Albert, Joe Bowden, Scott Caron, Josh Cohen, Greg Cunningham, Sue Hennessey, Lisa Honeyman, Jim Honeyman, Sheryl Kaczmarek, Tammie Ruda, Chris Sheldon, and PJ Wexler

1. Welcome

We started the meeting with introductions. Then Greg said a few thank-yous for the work everyone did to make the 2021-2022 MSDL season a success.

2. Financial report (Jim Honeyman)

We started the year with about \$34,000

We took in about \$11,760

We spent about \$16,290 between September 1, 2021 - May 6, 2022

We now have a balance of \$29,914

We made a decision not to charge schools for participation in our State finals tournaments, which is why we have less money at the end of this year than at the start. Had we not made States free, we would probably have broken even.

We have been advised to have at least two years' worth of reserves in our account, so we are in a good place.

A note for host schools in 2022-2023: You may need to increase entry fees because Tabroom.com charges per entry to use the platform.

League expenses to consider going forward: Equity officers, insurance, fees for Tabroom.com use, and fees school districts charge us when we host in their buildings. We may need to adjust the fees we charge in order to cover our increased expenses next year.

3. Calendar for 2022-2023

Tentative schedule:

22 October: Novice Tournament (location TBA)

28-29 October: Averill Debate Tournament (location TBA) - maybe part online

29 October: Revere Speech (waiting on approval)

12 November: Gracia Speech, Congress and PFD (Natick)

19 November: Little Lex Debate - plans to invite middle schoolers

3 December: L-S Speech, Congress and PF (note: This is an SAT date)

17 December: Holly Festival Speech, Congress and PFD (Natick)

7 January: NSHS Winter Festival Speech, Congress and PFD

14-16 January: Big Lex Debate

21 January: Boston Latin Speech, Congress and Debate

3-4 February: NSDA Quals (most likely)

11 February: NCFL combined quals (Shrewsbury)

19-20 February: Harvard

4 March: Mardi Gras (Shrewsbury) Speech, Congress & Debate - plans to invite middle schoolers

18 March: March Merriness (Needham) Speech, Congress & Debate - plans to invite middle schoolers

25 March: Debate States (Chelmsford)

1 April: Speech States (also MICA weekend: but if the music department signs up early for early slots, students should be able to do both if they self-advocate) - Acton-Boxborough

There is also a possibility of some online debate tournaments with the NY league

4. Proposed: Amend MSDL Rules and Regulations, ADD Section 3.2.6.1 as follows:

3.2.6.1 Establishing speaking order

At the start of the first session of the preliminary rounds and at the start of the Supersession, the initial speaking order (precedence) shall be randomly generated by the Parliamentarian using a random order generator, random number generator, or any acceptable equivalent. This rule may not be changed by a motion to suspend the rules. ~~This rule may not be changed by a tournament director.~~

Rationale

a. Ensure fairness:

- i. Each speaker should have the opportunity to show their abilities free from any prejudices or implicit biases of their competitors. As each competitor begins each round on a level playing field, no one competitor should have greater power over another to determine when they are allowed to speak, or to unfairly target or favor certain competitors over others.
- ii. This is especially important as competitors serving as Presiding Officers may have their own implicit biases, and whether they are aware of them or not, that can heavily influence the “random” order when chosen at their discretion rather than by a machine.

b. Ensure clarity:

- i. The Presiding Officer of each round serves the chamber to ensure that it runs smoothly. However, if they are allowed to choose speakers at their discretion, it is unclear to competitors and judges whether those decisions are truly “random” and whether the Presiding Officer is helping or harming the effectiveness of the chamber.

(Submitted by Sarah Donnelly)

Discussion: There seemed to be general agreement that this is a good idea. Some note that congress has always been run by students and they should handle problems as they arise. However, we don't have a mechanism for students to handle the situation if a PO is selecting people in a non-random manner and students have been complaining.

During the course of discussion, it was noted that students are never allowed to suspend MSDL rules, even if it is not explicitly stated in the rules. In Congress, they may choose to suspend Robert's Rules, however.

At a future board meeting, The board will add a statement to the MSDL rules document to clarify that students are never allowed to suspend MSDL rules. (We may create a committee to work on wording.)

Friendly amendment: Strike the last sentence: "This rule may not be changed by a tournament director." (This was accepted).

The motion passed unanimously.

5. Proposed: Amend MSDL Rules and Regulations, Section 3.2.15 as follows:

3.2.15 Supersession procedures

In Supersession, the first pro speech shall be followed by two minutes of questioning, as outlined below. The first con speaker shall likewise be followed by two minutes of questioning, as outlined below. Each subsequent speech on that legislation is followed by one minute of questioning. Questioning shall be conducted in 30-second blocks during the one- or two-minute periods. Upon a floor speaker's concluding remarks, the presiding officer shall recognize all four questioners for a two-minute period (or two questioners for a one-minute period), who shall question the speaker in the order called on. During each 30-second period, the floor speaker has control of the exchange, but does not need to yield. When the 30-second period lapses, the presiding officer shall tap the gavel once, and the next questioner shall commence. There is no minimum or maximum number of questions that may be asked during the exchange. Any motion to extend either the length of questioning time or number of blocks shall be ruled out of order. The precedence and recency priority system shall be used to ensure all legislators have an equal opportunity to ask questions. **Speaking order for Supersession shall follow speaking order guidelines as outlined by 3.2.6.1.**

The motion passes with one abstention.

6. Proposed: Amend MSDL Rules and Regulations, Section 3.2.1 as follows:

Schools which do not submit legislation by the submission deadline (the Friday of the week before the tournament, or otherwise as determined by the chair of congress) and fail to receive an exemption from the congress chair before the deadline will have their congress entries' ranking altered as listed in ~~3.2.11~~ 3.2.12.

Rationale:

- a. Legislation packets recently have been released on Sunday and Monday, removing critical prep time for many competitors. This is often due to late submissions. By setting a stricter submission requirement, students will have more incentive to submit legislation in a timely manner.

- i. When competitors have more time to prepare, it allows more cohesive, prepared, and high quality debates. Additionally, by giving students the weekend before the tournament to prepare, it prevents tournament preparation from conflicting with academic engagements.
- b. Section 3.2.1's reference to penalties points to an incorrect section, 3.2.11 titled "Questioning in Congress", instead of 3.2.12 "Scheduling of sessions"

(Submitted by Sarah Donnelly)

Discussion: There were questions about whether having a penalty for students from schools that don't submit legislation is appropriate. It seems to be unfair to newer programs, or programs with largely novice congressional squads. Some wonder if the existing rule is being enforced? If it's haphazardly being enforced, isn't that a problem? Many coaches don't ask for exemptions - or may not be aware that they have to ask for an exemption if they don't have legislation to submit.

Can we give programs an incentive to submit legislation rather than impose a penalty?
Is there a way to educate students about how to write legislation?

How do we get more (good) legislation submitted in a timely manner?

Maybe have a contest from time to time: students could submit legislation that would be put in a "bank" from which we could draw throughout the season as needed. We could have a drawing for a prize as incentive. As more legislation is needed, we could open the contest again. The bank would be managed by the Chair of Congress.

This is a procedural recommendation, not a rules change. We don't need to vote on this.

Motion by Donnelly: Strike the last sentence in 3.2.1: "Schools which do not submit legislation and fail to receive an exemption from the congress chair for doing so will have their congress entries' ranking altered as listed in 3.2.11."

2nd: Bowden

The motion passes with one abstention.

7. Proposed: Amend MSDL Rules and Regulations, Section 3.2.17 as follows:

3.2.17: ~~For the 2019-2020 season only:~~ Internet Use:

Electronic device use in Congressional Debate, including use of the internet, will be allowed with the following stipulations. . .

Rationale:

- a. Internet use in round has proved over the last two years to increase debate quality, as a result, the pilot should end and this rule should become permanent.
- b. All other restrictions outlined by 3.2.17 remain in place.

(Submitted by Sarah Donnelly)

Discussion: This motion simply codifies existing practice.

The motion passed unanimously.

**8. Proposed: Amend MSDL Rules and Regulations, amend the following sections:
3.2, 3.2.1, 3.2.3, 3.2.5, 3.2.10, 3.2.12, 3.2.13, 6.3.2**

“Student Congress” “Congressional Debate”

Replace “Student Congress” with “Congressional Debate”

Rationale:

- To standardize the naming of Congressional Debate throughout the MSDL. There is conflict between sections of the rulebook on whether to call it Student Congress (3.2, 3.2.1, 3.2.3, 3.2.5, 3.2.10, 3.2.12, 3.2.13 & 6.3.2) or Congressional Debate (3.2.16, 3.2.17 & 6.10).

(Submitted by Sarah Donnelly)

Discussion: Our rules document is not consistent. We should choose a name and stick with it.

- Calling the event “Congressional Debate” gives us more debate events
- Many leagues around the country call the event “Congressional Debate”
- Calling it “Congressional Debate” encourages students to engage in debate
- Traditionally we get congress participation from speech schools. By calling it “Congressional Debate”, maybe more debate schools will participate?
- Historically, we moved Congressional Debate to speech tournaments because the event was not often entered locally. In our league, offering the event at speech tournaments has really grown the event. Where will it be offered? (This is beyond the scope of this motion.)
- Moving the event to debate tournaments exclusively, would mean some speech schools will never be able to participate in the event.
- “Congress” tells us something about the event. “Debate” also tells us something about the event. “Student” doesn’t tell us anything. Semantically, calling it “Congressional Debate” makes sense.
- Our league rules already state that students who have participated in congress are no longer considered novices in debate. So we have already codified congress as a debate event.
- Where we offer the event needs to be considered, but this is ultimately a tournament director decision. Does it belong in the list of required speech events?
- This event is a bridge between speech & debate. It’s its own thing and we do not need to classify it as either. We have a separate chair for this event.
- The intention is to change the words “Student Congress” to “Congressional Debate” throughout the document.

The motion passed unanimously.

9. On the ballot for Informative Speaking, add a line to instructions to judges that states: Students should be judged on the basis of the originality and creativity of their visual aid, not on the professionalism or expense.

Justification: As a League, we are striving to ensure that our activity provides an equitable and positive experience for all. Since introducing Info in Massachusetts, visual aids have evolved much as they have throughout the country to involve pricey stands, carrying cases, and elaborate, professionally printed visual aids. This has become intimidating to students and is potentially hindering students from participating in this event. While the addition of this sentence to the ballot would not block students from using expensive visuals, it is intended as an attempt to level the playing field by taking the emphasis off the polish of the visuals and back onto the originality and creativity of the content.

(Submitted by Joyce Albert)

Discussion:

- Is this too restrictive? What if the type is too small to read? Or the quality is so bad that it's not useful? Can we include a note about "effectiveness?"
- There are some inequities that we can never solve with rules.
- A lot of agreement in the philosophy, but the wording suggests visual aids are required.
- Is this too subjective to codify?
- How are judges supposed to know how much something cost a student to produce? Some kids are really creative and spend a lot of time - not necessarily a lot of money - and the judge may assume they spent a lot and hold that against them.
- Should a judge be asked to evaluate "originality" or "creativity"? Isn't the purpose to be effective?
- Judges should consider, "Is the presentation more effective with the prop or without it?"
- Maybe this issue would be better addressed as part of the judge training. We want the judges to get the spirit of what we're trying to accomplish as educators.
- This is a multi-faceted problem. Students perceive that they have to spend a lot. Judges are overwhelmed in the morning and this is one more thing. We need to reinforce our values on our website, in judge meetings, as well as on ballots.

Friendly amendment: Change wording to: "Visual aids, if used, should be judged solely on whether they add substantially to the understanding and effectiveness of the message."

The motion passed unanimously.

10: Proposal/Discussion: That the Novice Festival tournament in October use the following topic for Novice Public Forum, and that league sanctioned tournaments in October be encouraged to use it.

Resolved: The United States should institute term limits on its Supreme Court Justices.

Rationale: The September-October PF topic, as determined by the NSDA, often demands a specificity of topic knowledge and the existence of a research skill level yet to be mastered by new debate students.

That, combined with learning debate structure, etc. is a burden no both novices, coaches, and those varsity students who may coach the movies.

Rationale for topic proposal

The proposed topic is an ‘evergreen’ one,, which introduces students to the basics of US government and political structure, knowledge which can be used for a variety of future topics.

A ‘modest novice’ topic for LD Debate has been successfully used for over a decade. It provides for both the predictability for novice education, and for the sharing of resources with new programs. That includes those new programs which may be reaching out the previous summer.

Both coaches and those varsity students who may be coaching novices will have personal experience with the topic, which is a pedagogically superior practice to “let’s stay one day ahead of the novices’ in learning the material”

A ‘modest novice’ topic also would remove the motives for sharing the ‘ information learned at summer camp’ with a) privileges programs which have students at summer camp and b) is often suboptimal for use by novices in any case.

Rationale for specific topic proposed

The topic proposed is likely to be discussed among scholars and commentators for the next several years. There is an ample research base on the topic, including at a level appropriate for novices. Many incoming ninth graders have had at least rudimentary exposure to civics, so may at least know the ‘right questions to ask’ which makes it unique from some other possible topics.

The reason for the ‘Supreme Court’ limit is due to this being the novice topic. (as opposed to establishing term limits for the Federal Courts in general)

Submitted: Paul Wexler

Discussion:

- Are there positives to having the novices join their more experienced team members in preparing the actual Sept/Oct topic that would be lost?
- This has been done in LD for a long time and it has worked well there.
- It’s a lot to ask a novice to learn all about the event while also learning about a topic they know little about. If the topic were more accessible and there were a lot of resources available, it may be easier to get kids to go to tournaments.
- In PF, sometimes the national Sept/Oct topics have been really hard, creating a large barrier to entry.
- Because having an “evergreen topic” has been successful in the LD community, it’s worth giving it a try in PF.
- Maybe run the novice topic longer – through Thanksgiving – so that students don’t have to prep this topic and then the November topic right afterwards. It would be used at all MSDL tournaments that offer a novice division.
- Might we reword the LD novice topic and use that?

- Kaz said she will commit to offering a division of novice with the novice topic at Little Lex in November if we vote for this proposal.

The motion passed with two abstentions.

11. Discussion Item:

We have all been relieved by the return to in person tournaments. However, several of us have noted that student decorum and respect have significantly declined recently. I'd like to open up the floor for a discussion on what we as a league (and each of us as individuals) can do to help foster community and encourage all to show respect for the activity.

(Submitted by Sarah Donnelly)

- Sarah gave us a number of specific examples of students who behaved unusually disrespectfully at tournaments once we went back to in-person this year. A student dropped pizza face down on the floor and then walked away. Students talked and laughed during an awards ceremony when a presentation was done about a coach who had died. Students had to be repeatedly reminded to put their masks back on and responded to adult requests by laughing.
- Maybe we can create a video message for MSDL students that explains the expectations?
 - Be respectful to others
 - Present yourself professionally
 - Be on time
 - Behave respectfully at awards ceremonies
- A lot of this is being fueled by how the nature of education has changed during the pandemic. Students are not being held accountable at school, so it's not surprising that they are behaving poorly at tournaments.
- A lot of this falls to the coaches. There is no longer much institutional knowledge about how to behave and we need to teach the kids.
- How can we help coaches prepare students for the first tournament? Maybe a video that we ask all coaches to watch? Include something about the "responsible" adult's responsibilities.
- We need to be sure to spend some time at the first few tournaments next fall explaining what our expectations are for students at tournaments.
- We also need to be better about following up with coaches when their students misbehave. Coaches have a lot of ability to address the issues directly.
- Not all schools have coaches - or coaches that come to the tournaments. So asking coaches to deal with their students may not work in all cases.
- The participation agreement needs to be enforced.
- Maybe ask the coach who is filling out the participation agreement to initial each part to encourage them to read it.
- Students need to understand that they are representatives of their school - not just individuals.

- Maybe a board member could be responsible for have a check-in with the adult who is in charge for each school. (Maybe at registration?) The adult in charge of each team competing that day must check in with the board member in the morning of the competition, leave their phone number, affirm that they've watched the video and that they will abide by the participation agreement.
- Add to the judge meeting a note, "If you are the adult with your school today, you must stay on site all day."
- Having an opening meeting for all students (both speech & debate) at which we discuss behavioral expectations is important.
- We can lay the groundwork at the novice tournament by making our expectations clear to the new students.

Committee to write/film the videos: Tammie, Melissa, Joyce, & Amanda.

12. Boston Debate League Summer Opportunities (Greg)

BDL will be offering workshops this summer for coaches. MSDL coaches are welcome.

13. New Business

- **PJ** - MSDL History
PJ requested information related to the history of the MFL/MSDL. If you have anything/find anything, please send it to him.
- **Josh** - Judge training videos
Judge training videos have gone over well. We need an LD module. Josh said that he will be happy to produce the video if PJ and Tammie send him some ideas of what they want covered.
- **Sarah** - Equity Officer
This person is being contracted by the MSDL. The MSDL will pay for one day per tournament. If a host school runs the tournament for several days, they must pay for any additional days. This year, the host was virtual - even when a tournament was in person. Scott Caron is our liaison. Scott will put out an email to coaches prior to each tournament with information about how to access the officer in the event that they are needed.

As far as we know, we didn't have any equity issues that surfaced during our in-person tournaments this spring. Is this a good way to use MSDL resources?

We worked with our Equity Officer to come up with a way for her to contact them.

Can we come up with a way a student could maintain anonymity when asking to speak with the equity officer?

- Provide an email address? Maybe set up one for this purpose that is monitored by the equity officer during the tournament?

- Provide a number to text?
- Talk to Scott - who will refer them to the equity officer?
- Fill in an intake form?

If we are going to be an equitable organization, we need to provide services such as this so that people feel safe and comfortable attending our tournaments. We need to provide a safe way for participants to reach out for help.

Think of it as a form of insurance. You hope you never need it, but it's good to have if you do. We want to be sure we have procedures in place to deal with issues as they arise. We also want to be sure students have good experiences so that they'll come back.

- We need to do a better job of publicizing the fact that an equity officer is available at all MSDL tournaments. Part of the reason it's not being used may be that people don't know it exists. Put it on the website, create a flier, include it in invitations etc.
- We also need to do a better job of explaining what an equity issue is so that people know when to reach out to the Equity Officer.

Can we create an annual survey about equity that we distribute to our students? That way we can collect some data and also track changes over time?

We hired Gretchen Segars for four tournaments for the 2021-2022 season. We need to reach out to her to see if she is available/interested in working with us again next year - and also to ask her if she can recommend to us someone who might like to work with us when she cannot.

Motion to adjourn at 1:56 by Joe Bowden.
2nd: Joyce Albert

The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lisa Honeyman

Clerk/Secretary